



Media Release

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For Immediate Release

Blind dairy farmer saves family farm, wins award

Rudy Kurz of Lonoke almost lost the farm that had been in his family for three generations after a chemical accident left him blinded in both eyes. The self-employed dairy farmer was determined to keep the farm and now has been named the Consumer of the Year by Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB). He was chosen for the honor from a field of 11 area winners.

While working on his dairy farm on September 13, 2006, Kurz received severe chemical burns to both eyes, resulting in sudden and irreversible blindness. "He could have easily given up, but his unwavering strength of character and true determination made me feel that he deserves this recognition," said his DSB vocational rehabilitation counselor Debera Coleman, who nominated him. Kurz praised his wife Terri and their three daughters for their support.

Kurz received a Masters degree in dairy science to enable him to efficiently manage the farm, but his degree did not prepare him in conducting day-to-day farm activities as an individual who is blind. Prior to the accident, he was able to independently program what cows went to which milking machine and the computer would do the rest. As a newly blinded individual, he found this to be a challenge in that he could not identify the cows nor could he enter the information into the control board.

Fortunately, the technology to identify cattle already existed; however, it was not accessible. Working in partnership, Kurz approached his bank to obtain financial assistance for purchasing the equipment needed, and DSB purchased the assistive technology to make it accessible. DSB technology staff went to the farm to train Kurz on the new equipment.

Other nominees for the second annual state Consumer of the Year Award were Tauny Chaffin of Alexander, Robert Chiaro of Little Rock, John Spencer of Paragould, Steven Tidwell of Pine Bluff,

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Brandon Carpenter of Camden (now living in Conway), Cynthia Asbury of Fort Smith, Linnie Stearman of Marianna, Rev. Gene Cross of Batesville, Rev. Randall Piker of Fouke, and Brent Philpot of North Little Rock.

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